

Serif House
10 Dudley Street
LUTON
LU2 0NT

February 1, 2009

Dear Mr. Field and Mr. Soames,

NALDIC (National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum) is dedicated to promoting the learning and achievement of bilingual pupils in schools. As professionals who support children learning English as an Additional Language in schools around Britain, we are concerned about recent statements from the Cross Party Group on Balanced Migration and particularly those that relate to the education of pupils in linguistically diverse contexts.

We understand that the Cross Party Group on Balanced Migration has a duty to examine how well current policies promote community cohesion and support the education and life chances of all those who live, work and attend school in the United Kingdom. As an association we have been lobbying for many years to ensure that government education policies recognise that linguistic diversity is a fact of life and ensure that this is reflected in our schools' curriculum and practices. We have acknowledged that the absence of cohesive policies and practices has caused difficulties for some schools, particularly since the accession of the new EU states in 2004.

However, in the current climate of opinion, which is often hostile towards families from minority ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, we are concerned at the use which is being made of information from the Cross Party Group by the local and national press. It is of concern to us, for example, that the Daily Mirror has reproduced on its website the listing of schools where high percentages of pupils are learning EAL.

We would also like to respond to your recently reported statements which touch on how well pupils can learn English within a multilingual or linguistically diverse environment. In these statements, the argument is put forward that children cannot *'be expected to integrate into our society if they are being taught in schools where English is the mother tongue of no pupils or a minority of pupils.'* This is not our experience, nor does it reflect the experiences of our members. In response we would like the Cross Party Group to take the following comments into account:

- 1) Integration into our society involves an understanding that our society is (and will remain) linguistically diverse. We would therefore argue that education within a multilingual environment is a positive rather than negative. The multilingual nature of many school classrooms is an ideal preparation for British and global society. In contrast, education in a school where all the pupils speak English as their first language will not provide the same preparation for our wider society.
- 2) Research both nationally and internationally has failed to show any correlation between linguistic diversity and the speed at which children acquire an additional language. Acquisition of an additional language does of course require exposure to the target language, but if the Cross Party Group is familiar with any linguistically diverse schools, they will be aware that there is no shortage of exposure to English within the setting, as well as within the wider environment. What research does show, and what is absent from the press coverage, is that exposure to different languages and a multilingual environment can heighten pupils' awareness of languages in general, which in turn has advantages in the way and speed at which they process and acquire a new language. For example, international research has shown that an effective way to promote the achievement of bilingual children is for them to continue to

develop their first languages alongside their learning of English. Whilst children are constantly exposed to English at school and in society as a whole, there are actually far fewer opportunities for them to use their first language which often is lost as a result. It is therefore vital that schools and communities promote the development of first language skills alongside English.

- 3) One of the factors in the speed of language acquisition and achievement is appropriate, linguistically sensitive teaching and curriculum provision. We would welcome the Cross Party Group's support for further development of teacher education and understanding as part of a coherent approach to migration. In order to promote the learning and achievement of all children in our schools we would urge you to speak out explicitly in favour of the development of such understandings and effective curriculum provision. Positive actions of this kind would lead to children growing up as competent bilinguals, able to use their knowledge in an increasingly multilingual world - both for their own benefit and for that of the British economy. Such positive actions would also enhance children's self-esteem through confidence in their bilingual identity, enabling them to feel fully integrated into British society.
- 4) The implication in the press reports is that there are no competent speakers of English in those schools highlighted, and that few of these pupils are British. This is a misunderstanding. Although the registration details of pupils may show that the home or first language is not English, this does not mean that they are lacking in English skills, nor does it give an indication of their nationality. Most of these children are British and indeed many (for the reasons noted above) will be more fluent in English than in their first language and many will be achieving highly within the English medium National Curriculum. We have long lobbied for a recognition on the part of government that pupils learning EAL should not be represented simply as 'Language other than English' but that a fair system of assessment be introduced which differentiates between pupils at different stages of this acquisition process, from beginner stage to fluency. Such a system would avoid the misunderstanding that pupils whose first language is other than English are all at early or beginner stages of using English socially and academically. Such a system would help target additional funding more appropriately as well as help schools provide appropriate support for pupils who most need it. We hope that you will feel able to take forward this point within your deliberations and would be happy to provide any further evidence you require.

We hope that the Cross Party Group on Balanced Migration will be able to reflect fairly both the challenges and advantages of learning and teaching within multilingual schools in order to develop an agenda which will promote educational opportunity and social inclusion for all our children. We would be delighted to provide further evidence to the Group and look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Davies
Chair
On behalf of NALDIC Executive Committee